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ABSTRACT

The VOICE (Violence Prevention Outcomes in Civic Education) program is one of a series of efforts to help schools develop curricula that can effectively and positively teach key concepts about government, the Constitution, the courts, and the underlying principles of these institutions. A key element of the VOICE program is that these concepts should be taught in ways that will affect behavior and reduce violence in society. This report consists of three separate parts: (1) an Executive Summary of the evaluation findings from the 1996-97 program year; (2) a report on the qualitative dimensions of the VOICE evaluation; and (3) a report on the quantitative dimensions of the evaluation effort. Each part of the report stands alone, including its own page numbering. However, it is recommended that the reports be read in tandem for a more thorough understanding of the evaluation of VOICE and the findings of the final report. (BT)

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ED 427 989

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

VIOLENCE PREVENTION OUTCOMES IN CIVIC EDUCATION

(VOICE, 1996-1997 Program Year)

Prepared for the Constitutional Rights Foundation-Chicago

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Introduction

This report consists of three separate parts. The first is an Executive Summary of the evaluation findings from the 1996-1997 program year. The second part is a report on the qualitative dimensions of the VOICE evaluation. The third portion is a report on the quantitative dimensions of the evaluation effort. Each is designed to be a stand-alone document, including its own page numbering. However, we recommend that the reports be read in tandem for a more thorough understanding of the evaluation and its findings.

Executive Summary

The VOICE program is the latest in a series of efforts to help schools develop curricula that can effectively and positively teach key concepts about government, the constitution, the courts and the fundamental principles that underlie these institutions. A second key element of the VOICE Program is that these concepts should be taught in ways that will affect behavior and reduce violence in society. VOICE is based on a series of ideas expressed in the following:

The project explores linkages between violence prevention and law-related education through the development, implementation and evaluation of a thirty-lesson fifth grade law-related education curriculum emphasizing understanding of law and government using interactive strategies and community resource persons. The curriculum integrates conflict resolution skill building and a service project with traditional social studies content. Over the course of an entire academic year, the curriculum moves students through stages of understanding, skill development and attitude change beginning with individual knowledge and skill enhancement, followed by understanding of group membership and concurrent group participation, and concluding with awareness of their community and a service learning activity.

Program Objectives and Evaluation

The objectives of the program and the issues that are important in its evaluation are presented below:

Evaluation of the program will examine ways that increases in students' knowledge and skills affect students' beliefs and actions about resolving conflicts peacefully in our society. The program's learning objectives are grounded in the research on violence and effective violence prevention, experiences of the program developers and Chicago teachers, the Chicago Public Schools' and Illinois' fifth grade learning outcomes, the purposes of conflict resolution and law-related education programs, and research on law-related education. Each of the sequential lessons designed to meet measurable objectives consistent with the overall VOICE framework.

Qualitative Evaluation Methodology

The following approach was used to conduct the qualitative analysis of the VOICE program.

- Comments made by students in focus group sessions held in the spring of 1997 in selected fifth grade classes in Chicago and Elgin, Illinois schools were tape-recorded. Each group consisted of five students. Students from seven different schools participated in the focus groups and slightly more than 90 percent of the students from experimental groups were interviewed. The students' comments were made in response to two sets of questions: open-ended interpretive questions and specific response questions.

- Comments made by teachers and administrators during the same time the focus group sessions were held with the students were also tape-recorded.

- A videotape recording was made of preparations for and delivery of service learning projects at one of the schools.

- Notes were taken on working group sessions held with teachers and administrators throughout the school year. Participating Chicago teachers met every six weeks; Elgin teachers met twice.

- In addition, other materials were reviewed to help understand the VOICE program. Most important were a description of the "Youth for Justice Research & Development Project: Linking Violence Prevention with Law-Related Education: Chicago Public School Fifth Grade Social Studies" and the *I'm A VOICE Ask Me!* teaching unit guideline prepared by the Constitutional Rights Foundation- Chicago, with assistance from the American Bar Association (ABA).

  These various materials were collected and analyzed in a report prepared by SSEC in September 1997. Other materials available for review, but not included in this report because of lack of resources, include work-polls, student projects, journals, and written evaluations of the VOICE lessons by both teachers and students.

Qualitative Analysis: Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the qualitative analysis are summarized briefly below:

- *Summary of Focus Group Responses.* Focus group responses indicated that:

  93.4 percent of students are now more aware of their rights.
  93.2 percent have a better understanding of how to solve problems for themselves.
  92.1 percent have a better understanding of the reason for rules and laws.
  87.6 percent learned a lot about government, law, and history.
  A similar percentage of students had a better understanding of how to help others solve problems.

84.6 percent learned other ways to solve problems than by fighting or using violence.
A similar percentage gained a better understanding of their responsibility for their own actions.
83.3 percent learned to respect the opinion of others.
80.1 percent valued working in small groups because more information was shared.
Slightly over half used mediation and negotiation skills with their friends.
Slightly less than a third indicated their use of mediation and negotiation skills at home.

(With respect to the last two findings, the interviews suggested that children did, in fact, attempt to use their mediation and negotiation skills at home and with friends, even though the process was not always successful.)

- *Pedagogic Value of Focus Groups.* Student focus groups also proved to be a positive learning experience as well as an effective method of evaluation.

- *Student Reactions to Program Delivery.* Another important result of the qualitative analysis is an understanding of how children reacted to both the content of the lessons delivered as well as the form of delivery of the VOICE program. The students remembered most vividly and accurately those lessons they captured through readily understandable and visible "hooks" as in the names of the programs presented, like "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Sacred Blade."

- *Student Indicators: Best Practice.* The lessons that seem to best stick with students also often have a clear cognitive lesson as well as a behavioral or action component and allow the student to exercise, or potentially exercise, some control of his or her environment. By example, the mediation lessons met all of these conditions and were frequently cited by students as one of their best experiences in the VOICE program.

- *Student Indicators: Ineffective Practice.* for Another aspect of both content and form of delivery that students use to judge the success of a lesson is whether it is "boring," i.e., whether a lesson comes across like most school lessons or not. Boredom is reduced or eliminated when lessons are given in a way that reduces the constancy and changes the routine. Students, for the most part, are clear and reasonable about what is boring and what is not, how it can be alleviated, and when it should be accepted as a part of being a student or teacher.

- *Academic and Real-Life Applications.* Review of the audio tapes reveals an important distinction between academic and real-life lessons and raises issues about the transfer of academic lessons to real-life applications.

Quantitative Evaluation: Methodology

Pre- and post-tests instruments were administered to classes of Fifth grade students both in Chicago, and Elgin, Illinois. The students who completed the pre- and post-tests were in either experimental classrooms (four in Chicago and seven in Elgin, who received the VOICE program) and control classrooms (three in Chicago and four in Elgin who did not receive the VOICE program).

The pre- and post-tests were designed with four sets of student outcomes in mind. These outcomes included knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors following the VOICE outcomes document

developed in 1996 by program staff and participating teachers from the target schools. More specifically, the focus was on how increases in students' knowledge and skills affect their beliefs and actions about resolving conflicts peacefully in our society.

The VOICE program was designed to integrate seamlessly into the ongoing Fifth Grade social studies curriculum. These pre- and post-tests, comprising 87 separate items in two instruments, were administered in two phases: the first focusing on student knowledge and skills; the second on student attitudes and behaviors. The knowledge/skills test consisted of 24 items in a variety of formats (e.g., matching, true-false, and multiple choice items), while the attitude and behavior test consisted of 63 items, most in the form of Likert scales. Open-ended items asking students to respond to hypothetical problem situations were also included in the attitude-behavior instrument. These results are not reported here.

All the pre- and post-tests returned to SSEC by program staff and participating teachers were coded and entered into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) database. Somewhat more than 600 completed tests were eventually coded and entered into the database. Subsequent analysis showed, however, that a large number of tests had to be discarded, largely because pre-tests could not be matched with post-tests. The sample size was approximately 140 students (this varied somewhat from question to question).

Because of the nature of the experiment and resulting data, the evaluators chose to use a matching sample T-test procedure as the statistic of choice. The matching sample T-test essentially compares the means of a data item or variable (say, a knowledge question) for two matched groups at time one (pre-test) and at time two (post-test). A confidence level of 95% was used as the measure of statistical significance for the compared differences in means. The data tables in the quantitative portion of this report are based on these procedures.

Quantitative Analysis: Conclusions

The quantitative results indicate the following for each of the three areas considered:

Knowledge and Skills

- *Greater Improvement in Experimental Groups*. The extent of changes in mean scores unambiguously favor all experimental groups compared to the control groups. The experimental groups learned three times as much as the control groups. Both groups were comparable in what they knew at the beginning of the year.

- *No Items with a Statistically Significant Increase Favor Control Groups*. There is no single knowledge or skills item where a statistically significant increase in mean scores favors the control groups over the experimental groups in either Chicago or Elgin.

- *Instrument Coherence with Curriculum*. The control groups' scores also showed desirable change in a number of instances at a statistically significant level. This fact suggests that the knowledge and skill test is at least moderately well-tailored to the Fifth Grade curriculum where the VOICE program has been infused.

- *Improvements in ITBS Scores*. The above three findings are further reinforced by Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores, which showed substantial improvement by the experimental classrooms in the four Chicago Public Schools as compared to the control schools. This data was reported by the principals and is available on the Chicago Public Schools web site. The Elgin Social Studies Coordinator reported similar results for all but one of the classrooms in his district.

- *Initial Knowledge Base*. Although there are statistically significant changes in a desirable direction for those items dealing with individual rights and the Bill of Rights, the relatively low pre-test scores on virtually all of these items (compared to others on the test) suggests that particular attention should be paid to such concepts during instruction.

- *Sustained Awareness of Content*. It should be noted that the qualitative study indicates that 97.4 percent of the students in experimental classrooms became more aware of their rights and were able to intelligently discuss issues surrounding rights, even several months after they had experienced the curriculum.

- *Overall Impact on Knowledge and Skills*. The upshot of the foregoing discussion is that the VOICE program appears to have had a significant impact on students' knowledge and skills over and above what might have been expected from the standard curriculum.

Attitudes

- *Classroom Context*. On a variety of measures, the VOICE program has desirable effects on student attitudes, most of which are related to the classroom context.

- *Larger Environment*. Measures of student attitudes about situations beyond the classroom showed little change, positively or negatively, between pre- and post-tests.

- *Additional Information*. It should be noted that the qualitative study provided additional insights on attitudes, particularly regarding students' positive feelings toward the classroom activities, their teacher, their classmates, and the resource people who they met.

Behavior

- *Overall Change*. Most of the items developed to ascertain changes in behavior showed no change. This outcome results at least in part from the fact that participating students already had low scores concerning undesirable behaviors at the start of the program. This may represent a ceiling effects of sorts--reported instances of undesirable behavior are not likely to decline much if they were already low at the beginning of the program.

- *Community Environment*. In this regard, it must be emphasized that all of the participating schools were in neighborhoods with relatively high levels of violence and gang activity. Thus, environmental risk factors were high for all students. However, the students appeared to be most at risk academically, not behaviorally, many students reading below grade level..

- *Discipline*. It is important to note that the interviews with the schools' principals indicated that

they had fewer problems with discipline and fighting after the implementation of VOICE. When they did have problems, students were more reasonable when subject to disciplinary action.

- *Physical Fighting.* Most of the variables that showed a change in an undesirable direction were related to physical fighting. These behaviors, it may be argued, are not in the exclusive control of an individual student; at least not without a great deal of practice in avoidance strategies, willingness to deal with the possible opprobrium of significant peers, and perhaps some luck.

- *Instrument Limitations.* The large number of items on the attitude and behavior parts of the pre- and post-test may also have had an adverse effect on student responses.

Observations on Merging the Results from Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

Given the overall emphasis of the VOICE Program on teaching knowledge and skills (the concepts, vocabulary, and actions) that lead to positive changes in attitudes and behaviors, consideration of the results and conclusions of both the qualitative and quantitative research suggests the following.

- Merging both types of evaluation research reported here indicates that students did learn about the concepts that the VOICE Program deemed important. It also seems to have influenced the way students think about the world (i.e., out-of-class concerns), although to a lesser extent than for in-class concerns. They also indicate that VOICE did change student behavior in-class to a yet smaller, but still acknowledged, extent (or at least in terms of how they think about their behavior). It would also appear that VOICE had no discernible effects on their out-of-class behavior. However, it is significant that students could focus on their out-of-class behavior and that they would even consider modifying how they act and react. The focus group discussions with students revealed some students' willingness to consider such changes and to experiment, even if only verbally, with what the consequences of new behaviors might be.

- It would appear that the VOICE Program faces the same problems one might expect in any situation that tries to change attitudes and behaviors rather than just conveying knowledge. Further, one may reasonably argue that knowledge is the easier of the three to teach and to learn, followed by attitudes and then behaviors. The latter two are undoubtedly more resistant to teaching and learning and therefore take more time and, perhaps, conscious effort to change. (One has only to think of an adult who continues to smoke cigarettes even though quite aware of the possible health effects of that behavior.) Moreover, the learners' ability to transfer the skills learned (i.e., to apply what is learned) to other, apparently dissimilar, situations may be difficult without extended opportunities, practice, and conscious encouragement. In any case, it is again important to note that student self-reported attitudes and behaviors were already relatively pro-social at the beginning, despite the environmental risks facing them in their neighborhoods.

Program Recommendations

- Offer the VOICE curriculum to other schools across the country. This evaluation has revealed that students pay attention to what they learned in VOICE. Other lessons are that the program has significant potential for future payoffs, the learning process can be enjoyable, the curriculum can be implemented in diverse settings, its lessons can provide students with some power in their lives, they can teach others what they have learned, and they can use its lessons to understand violence in society on a daily basis.

- Tie VOICE lessons into other curricula and programs so that learning is reinforced across different classes and situations. As two students themselves suggested, a VOICE club could be created (their analogy was the 4-H club). Develop additional lessons that show students how the ideas in VOICE are part of a historical process that ties us together as a society. The program was designed to be interdisciplinary and to be used in self-contained classrooms. However, some schools have departmentalized, which may mean involving all of the non-social studies teachers to help them reinforce program objectives.

- If possible, provide more incentives to teachers to keep them positively motivated about the VOICE program. Included among the possibilities for accomplishing this objective are developing different formats for VOICE, rotating these units in different years or semesters, putting more emphasis on adaptation of the program to day-to-day events, increasing the range of exercises and units over time, varying the types of visitors and the specific individuals who visit the schools, and varying dates and locations of field trips. Encourage teachers to modify, within reason, the units to their own style.

- Include the experienced teachers in developing and planning future VOICE programs. Involving these teachers in expanding the program and training other teachers in the use of VOICE is not only an effective strategy for future implementation, but is a potentially valuable staff development medium for the experienced teachers as well as the new teachers.

- Improve the outcomes of the program by focusing on what best creates positive and useful skills, attitudes and behaviors, how the lessons should be constructed and delivered, and what the focus should be for the lesson, e.g., in class behavior or out of class behavior. One way to visualize this planning process would be as a matrix with knowledge and skills on the left, attitude, behavior in class and behavior out of class along the top right, and elements like participation and the quality of the message as variable links between the two sides of the matrix. Both quantitative and qualitative issues could be considered through such a matrix planning process.

- In developing or refining lessons for the VOICE program, one of the key criteria should be to create lessons that are multifaceted and, therefore, reinforce learning in different ways.

- The lessons that are given to students should also be prepared so that students are not asked to learn behaviors that will jeopardize them in situations they encounter out of class, and so that they can also learn what to realistically expect when they act in new ways. Lessons like how to mediate conflict would be taught along with lessons about where and when to use it and what to

expect in different situations.

- More explanations could be provided for students to illustrate how conflict and violence builds up before it actually occurs. In the police unit, for example, the students were taught how and why violence happens, when it can be addressed, and when not to address it and simply walk away. These strategies could also be provided as a part of other units as well to show students a range of examples of what happens in violent situations and how to use what they learned in VOICE to understand and deal with violence at home, with friends, in the newspapers and magazines, on television, and in the behavior of others in general.

- Because of the students' interest in action, videotaping all students in their various role play exercises should be done as often as possible. These tapes could be used as part of the learning process by letting students watch and critique their own performances. Videotapes of mediation in practice and other approaches to preventing and dealing with violence could also be shown to the classes at critical points.

- The most powerful field trip in the current program--to the Police Training Academy--should be retained in the future. When the VOICE program is implemented in other communities, similar field experiences should be found and included.

Evaluation Recommendations

- Reduce the total number of items covered in the quantitative pre- and post-test evaluation instruments.

- Target the items on the tests more closely to the actual curriculum and the components of the curriculum that focus most accurately on what is different in the VOICE program either as input or outcome.

- The focus group sessions should all be taped (preferably videotaped) to preserve both specific comments and problem-solving approaches to issues that arise as well as to capture the tone of the dialogue and the more detailed comments.

- Hold focus groups with teachers and students more frequently, at least midway during the program as well as at the end. Focus groups held at the beginning would also provide a good view of expectations and pre- and post-program results.

- Improve the qualitative research protocol by some practical steps that include making sure the recording equipment and locations are adequate and providing identifying details for each taping. In many research situations, such details are easily overlooked, although attention to them can greatly improve the results of the study.